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Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report gives an account of the range of initiatives activities undertaken at the regional and national levels within the Caribbean region to ensure the protection of the Caribbean Sea from degradation, pollution and loss of marine biodiversity, and provides an update on the regional and international support that has been extended towards the promotion of the sustainable development of the resources of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations.

The report also contains an annex with a report of the Association of the Caribbean States on its work, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/197.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 61/197 of 20 December 2006, entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations", the General Assembly called on the United Nations system and the international community to assist, as appropriate, Caribbean countries and their regional organizations in their efforts to ensure the protection of the Caribbean Sea from degradation as a result of pollution from ships, from illegal dumping or accidental release of hazardous waste and dangerous chemicals, to develop programmes to halt the loss of marine biodiversity in the Caribbean Sea; to support national and regional activities for the promotion of the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources; to assist the region in the implementation of their programmes of disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, management, relief and recovery.

2. The General Assembly, welcoming the continued efforts of the States members of the Association of Caribbean States to further develop their concept of the Caribbean Sea as a special area within the context of sustainable development, invited the Association to submit a report on its progress in implementation of the resolution. The Secretary-General was requested to report to the General Assembly to report to it at its sixty-third session, under the sub-item entitled "Follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States" of the item entitled "Sustainable development", on the status of implementation of the present resolution, taking into account the views expressed by relevant regional organizations.

3. The present report includes information received from entities of the United Nations system and relevant regional organizations invited to report on their efforts towards implementing resolution 61/197, as well as information on activities undertaken at the national level by Member States. Special focus is given the report of the Association of Caribbean States, which is the regional organization designated by the Member States of the Caribbean with overall responsibility for implementation of the Caribbean Sea initiative.

II. Activities undertaken at the national and regional levels

A. Regional activities

4. The Association of Caribbean States remained actively engaged with its mandate to support the ongoing initiative of the region to have the international community declare the Caribbean Sea a special area in the context of sustainable development. To this end, the Association established the Caribbean Sea Commission in September, 2006, to provide a structure for political oversight, technical resources and research support for the Caribbean Sea initiative, and to promote regional efforts towards achieving the preservation and sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea.

5. Technical support for the work of the Commission was provided by regional experts working through a technical advisory group created by the Association of Caribbean States, and research to advance the Caribbean Sea Initiative received significant contribution from the Caribbean Sea Ecosystem Assessment, a project

led by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine and the Cropper Foundation, in collaboration with The Institute of Marine Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean Conservation Association and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute.

6. The Caribbean Sea Commission, at its most recent meeting held in July 2008, finalized its Plan of Action and programme of activities. The report of the Association of Caribbean States, attached as an annex to the present report, provides a comprehensive account of the technical, administrative and political initiative being invested in the Caribbean Sea initiative.

7. The UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme, a member of the Caribbean Sea Commission, has remained an active partner in the Caribbean Sea initiative, integrally involved in programmes related to marine spill and pollution management; the establishment of ecosystem, habitat and species conservation measures; and capacity-building.

8. The Caribbean Environment Programme has actively promoted accession/ratification of the Protocol concerning land-based sources of marine pollution within the framework of the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region. National promotional workshops were held in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and Saint Lucia.

9. The Caribbean Environment Programme, in collaboration with the UNEP Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities also assisted in facilitating the development and implementation of national programmes of action for the prevention of pollution from land-based sources and activities. Direct support was provided to completion of these plans in Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. Ongoing efforts are focused on strategic planning and sustainable financing to enable these national programmes of action to be mainstreamed into development planning processes and implemented.

10. Following the preparation of a sewage needs assessment guidance document for implementing annex III of the Protocol concerning Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol), relating to wastewater management, pilot projects were initiated in Saint Lucia and Jamaica to develop national planning mechanisms to control marine pollution from domestic sewage. Detailed project plans for improving infrastructure for sewage and wastewater management were also developed. Similar sewage needs assessments are ongoing in Tobago and Panama and, once finalized, efforts will focus on the sharing of experiences from these national assessments.

11. As a complementary activity to the regional sewage needs activities and further to the outcomes of the sewage needs assessments conducted in Saint Lucia, a regional workshop to promote environmentally sound technologies in the provision of sanitation and water at the community level was conducted in Jamaica. One of the proposed initiatives highlighted at the workshop was the establishment of a Caribbean revolving fund for regional wastewater investment and management.

12. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Regional Coordinating Unit for the Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP CAR/RCU)

and the Regional Activity Centre for Regional Marine Pollution Emergency, Information and Training Centre-Wider Caribbean hosted five pollution prevention seminars in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia on the ratification and implementation of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto (MARPOL), annex V. The seminars facilitated the exchange of information between participants on legislative and administrative procedures regarding annex V of MARPOL, specifically calling attention to the issue of waste reception facilities in the wider Caribbean region, with a view to placing the special area provisions of annex V of MARPOL into effect. The Caribbean Environment Programme also supported the convening of a workshop on the development of a regional cooperation mechanism for response to oil spills, which will be completed in 2008.

13. The publication entitled "Marine Litter in the Wider Caribbean — A Regional Overview and Action Plan" was developed by UNEP CAR/RCU in collaboration with regional experts as a part of a pilot project initiative with support from the UNEP Regional Seas Programme and the Swedish Government. The primary goal of this pilot project was to assist in the environmental protection and sustainable development of the wider Caribbean region related to the prevention and reduction of marine litter. Complementary activities under way include the creation of a marine litter database that will provide marine debris data for the region and access to related links and collaborating organizations. Further action towards the implementation of the regional action plan is being tested in three pilot countries: Barbados, Guyana and Saint Lucia, to strengthen related legislation and policy requirements, and monitoring and economic assessment mechanisms and improve education awareness programmes to reduce national and regional impacts of marine litter.

14. The Global Environment Facility-funded project on the theme "Integrating watershed and coastal areas management (IWCAM) in small island developing States of the Caribbean" supports legislative and policy reform at the island States level, capacity-building to implement those reforms, and demonstration projects on key issues facing individual States. Most demonstration projects launched illustrated how the reduction of contaminants can address water scarcity and improve the quality of the marine environment and coastal resources. A series of studies have been conducted to guide countries in the implementation of the IWCAM project: review of Global Environment Facility (GEF) Indicators Mechanisms; an inventory of policy and legislation relevant to IWCAM; a review of relevant and ongoing projects; and an assessment of geographic information systems for IWCAM. Guidance materials related to model legislation and accession to relevant multilateral environmental agreements, including the Cartagena Convention and the LBS Protocol, was also produced. Regional activities also included public awareness-raising through a variety of media, including quarterly newsletters, notably the *Caribbean WaterWays*.

15. The GEF-funded project on the theme "Reducing pesticide run-off to the Caribbean Sea" was initiated in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Colombia to protect the Caribbean marine environment by reducing pesticides runoff, implementing comprehensive management practices and specific measures to control the use and application of pesticides in the agricultural sector. National coordinating committees were established with ample stakeholder participation. Capacities, strengths and

weaknesses for monitoring of pesticides in the environment were identified, and workplans were drafted for the development of a coastal monitoring programme in the three countries.

16. As a co-Chair of the White Water to Blue Water partnership initiative, the Caribbean Environment Programme developed partnerships to enhance integrated approaches in areas such as wastewater and sanitation, sustainable agricultural practices, integrated coastal management, sustainable tourism and environmentally sound marine transport in the wider Caribbean region. The partnership initiative also provides for discussions and information sharing between potential partners from these different areas to collaborate on projects to be implemented in the wider Caribbean region.

17. In order to enhance the capacity of the countries of the wider Caribbean region to implement the LBS Protocol and to improve the knowledge about the status and quality of the marine environment and its resources, a partnership called "Regional Network in Marine Science and Technology for the Caribbean: The Know-why Network" is under implementation, with partners that include the Marine Research Institute of the Ministry of Environment of Colombia, IOCARIBE and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Assessment and monitoring programmes have been initiated to update baseline pollution information through scientific analysis, and capacity-building facilitates the increased use of technologies such as geographical information systems for mapping the marine environment, water quality and pollution loads from land-based sources. Existing and proposed information systems are under evaluation to develop a pollution information node and a database on the state of the marine environment of the wider Caribbean region.

18. The Caribbean Environment Programme, through its Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW), provided support to sustainable management initiatives for queen conch and spiny lobster. Activities include support to the development of management plans for conch in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Barbados and development of a monitoring and management manual for queen conch. Capacity-building activities were implemented in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for the management of the conch and lobster fisheries.

19. Coral reef monitoring and assessments were conducted by subregional nodes in the wider Caribbean region, and a tool for economic valuation of coral reefs was developed in collaboration with the World Resource Institute. In response to the designation of 2008 as the International Year of the Reef, the Caribbean Environment Programme and SPAW organized a meeting for coral reef managers and relevant organizations to assist with planning for the celebration of the Year and outlined activities for the International Year of the Reef 2008 Campaign in the Wider Caribbean, and to collate inputs from managers on research needs for the upcoming eleventh International Coral Reef Society Symposium, in July 2008.

20. The Mesoamerican Reef Alliance project was finalized in 2007. This was a Caribbean Environment Programme partnership developed in conjunction with the International Coral Reef Action Network, and a collaborative effort aimed at confronting the decline of coral reef ecosystems and improving the economic and environmental sustainability of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef through capacity-building activities, the development of better practices, and building of partnerships

with the private sector. Project partners are now well positioned to continue capacity-building efforts and development of local partnerships and alliances.

21. The Organization of American States (OAS), consistent with its mandate to support its member countries in advancing sustainable development and natural disaster risk reduction, participated in several activities in promotion of the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea.

22. As part of a GEF-funded US$ 4 million project executed by OAS in cooperation with UNEP, a study on the impact of a sedimentation plume on Caribbean coastal waters was carried out by the Laboratory of Marine Chemistry and the Laboratory of Oceanography and Coastal Management of the National University of Costa Rica, jointly with the Department of Environmental Sciences of the Environmental Science and Technology Faculty of the Central American University of Nicaragua. A series of digital maps for all surveyed parameters was produced, along with tabular data, which provided comprehensive analysis of the impact of upstream sedimentation production and its transportation to the coastal and marine zone, as well as its impact on biodiversity and water quality.

23. The Caribbean Hazard Mitigation Capacity-Building Programme, completed in 2007, was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and executed by OAS, with implementation at the regional level by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency. The project sought to enhance the capacity of the Caribbean region to reduce its vulnerability to natural hazards through the development of national hazard mitigation policies and plans, the promotion of hazard mapping and vulnerability assessment information as decision-making supports to hazard mitigation interventions, and by facilitating the integration of comprehensive safer building practices in the informal building sector through training and certification.

24. Project activities were implemented in four pilot States: Belize, British Virgin Islands, Grenada and Saint Lucia. National hazard mitigation policies and plans were drafted, adopted and integrated into the national planning of the project's participating countries; vulnerability risk assessments were generated for storm surge, sea level rise, and coastal flooding; and the capacity of the informal construction sector to implement safer construction techniques was strengthened.

25. The Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change Project, funded by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and also complete, focused on building capacities in the Caribbean region for climate change adaptation interventions in general and sea level rise in particular. This project was mainly carried out through generating vulnerability assessments information, formulating adaptive planning mechanisms, and implementation of institutional and technical capacity-building activities in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) participating countries.

26. This project had four main elements: the design and establishment of a sea level/climate monitoring network; the establishment of databases and information systems; an inventory of coastal resources; and use and formulation of initial adaptation policies. Its main outputs included the establishment of a sea level and climate monitoring system with the related data management networks in 12 CARICOM countries; improved climate-related information access; and increased

awareness of policymakers of the impact of climate hazard risk on national development.

27. The Department of Sustainable Development of the OAS also initiated a project on the theme "Eco-economics and management effectiveness of the coastal zone in the Caribbean". Work is under way on cost-effective interventions to protect the "supply" of biodiversity as an economic asset; on a marine system valuation of the "demand" for biodiversity; and on the establishment of marine park management effectiveness databases. Eco-economic analysis of the Montego Bay Marine Park and its environs in Jamaica, for example, indicate that total benefits from the Montego Bay reefs are US$ 401 million net present value. Cost-effective expenditures to improve reef health include the installation of a sediment trap, waste aeration, implementation of improved household solid waste collection, and implementation of economic incentives to improve waste management by the hotel industry.

28. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) secretariat instituted a sustainable oceans governance programme to promote regional economic development through the sustainable management of ocean resources and protection of the marine environment. The programme is intended to enable the OECS secretariat to create an institutional framework for regional cooperation in transboundary ocean management, strengthen capacity for development and implementation of oceanic law and policy, and facilitate technical cooperation.

29. During the incubation of the OECS sustainable oceans governance programme, activities undertaken focused on developing an institutional structure and terms of reference for an oceans management unit; auditing existing ocean resources regimes, which has revealed the need for the development of clean national policy, stronger legal frameworks, national coordinating mechanisms, the provision of resources, and expansion of the OECS role; and reviewing key provisions of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other related agreements.

30. OECS States are giving consideration to a number of priority areas, including participation in the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme, which enables flag States to assess how effectively they implement and enforce relevant IMO convention standards.

31. In the area of regional security, the OECS States continue to undertake maritime security interventions through the regional security system. The regional security system promotes cooperation in the prevention and interdiction of trafficking in illegal narcotics, national emergencies, immigration, fisheries protection, customs, maritime policing, natural disasters and national security.

32. Under the OECS fisheries management and development strategy, States are currently giving consideration to a number of issues, including the formulation of a fisheries management arrangement for migratory pelagic fish and large coastal pelagic species; strengthening regional organizations and implementation and enforcement of international agreements; the development of strategies for sustainably managing fisheries, taking into account community needs and climate change; increased benefit flows from employment in fisheries; determining the suitability of vessels and platforms in use; and supporting legislation developed as part of the OECS secretariat assistance programme.

33. OECS welcomed the increase in capacity-building activities of the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, including training courses on marine protected areas, in cooperation with the International Ocean Institute. Of particular value was the training course started by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea at the subregional level to assist States in the preparation of submissions for the delineation of the continental shelf.

34. FAO has been addressing the management and conservation of aquatic resources, the utilization, marketing and trade of fishery products, and the development of fisheries policies. Focus is being given to the promotion of responsible fisheries sector management at all levels; the promotion of increased contribution of responsible fisheries and aquaculture to world food supplies and food security; and the global monitoring and strategic analysis of fisheries, with priority given to the development of databases and analysis of information.

B. International support

35. Norway has allocated NOK 2.5 million to the project "Many strong voices". The project, which links research and advocacy with a view to improving knowledge and skills for adaptation to climate change, has enabled exchange of competence and knowledge on developing coastal communities' capacity for dealing with climate change between small island developing States communities and communities in the Arctic region. Some 16 Arctic and island countries are currently actively involved in the project. The first year of the project has been successfully completed. Norway intends to further support this initiative.

36. Norway has also allocated NOK 36 million to the UNEP/Grid Arendal's Continental Shelf Programme. The programme aims at providing small island developing States in particular with the data necessary to make a claim to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for an extension of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

37. The Government of Iceland sponsored a high-level round table and business and investment forum on international cooperation for sustainable development in Caribbean small island developing States in Barbados in March 2008. The sustainable management of fisheries was one of the principal areas of attention at the meeting, which was attended by 16 small island developing States in the Caribbean, the Government of Iceland, regional intergovernmental organizations, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other United Nations programmes and agencies. The meeting set the basis for closer cooperation and the development of partnerships between Iceland and the Caribbean region.

38. Japan continues to provide assistance to the Caribbean member States in support of the Caribbean Sea initiative, through the Japan-CARICOM Friendship and Cooperation Fund. A grant of US$ 101,000 was made available in 2008 for flood forecasting in the region. Substantial support has been provided to CARICOM States for the financing of the construction of fisheries centres. These include Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Dominica, Suriname, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and, most recently in 2007, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Japan is also supporting projects in Caribbean disaster management, fisheries resource management and sustainable tourism development.

III. Conclusion

39. **The contributions received from the entities of the United Nations system, regional organizations and donor countries in response to General Assembly resolution 61/197 demonstrate the degree of their interest in and commitment to efforts aimed at protecting the Caribbean Sea and its resources. The value of a collaborative approach to the management and protection of the shared resources of the Caribbean Sea is also highlighted. There is therefore much to be gained from the fullest implementation of the resolution by all Member States and relevant organizations. More active participation and reporting is therefore strongly encouraged.**

40. **The establishment of the Caribbean Sea Commission by the Association of Caribbean States also underscored the continued commitment of the member States of the wider Caribbean to work towards the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area. With the inauguration of its Plan of Action this year, it is expected that this objective will be pursued in an even more structured and substantive manner.**

Annex

Report of the Association of Caribbean States to the United Nations Secretary-General as requested in paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 61/197: Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations

Introduction

1. The present report covers the activities of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in respect of actions highlighted in General Assembly resolution 61/197, as well as other issues covered, as set out in paragraph 11 of the resolution:

> "Calls upon the international community, the United Nations system and the multilateral financial institutions, and invites the Global Environment Facility, within its mandate, to support actively the national and regional activities of the Caribbean States towards the promotion of the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources."

2. The report specifically deals with the issues covered in paragraphs 1-4 and 13 of resolution 61/197.[a]

3. Activities covered in some detail relate to: (a) sustainable tourism; (b) Caribbean Sea Commission; and (c) disaster reduction.

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[a] "Recognizes that the unique biodiversity and highly fragile ecosystem of the Caribbean Sea require that Caribbean States and relevant regional and international development partners work together to develop and implement regional initiatives to promote the sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources, including, inter alia, the further development of their concept of the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, without prejudice to relevant international law;"
"Takes note with interest of the creation by the Association of Caribbean States of the Commission on the Caribbean Sea;"
"Takes note of the effort of the Caribbean States to further develop their concept of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, without prejudice to relevant international law, and invites the international community to recognize such efforts;"
"Recognizes the efforts of the Caribbean countries to create conditions leading to sustainable development aimed at combating poverty and inequality, and in this regard notes with interest the initiatives of the Association of Caribbean States in the focal areas of sustainable tourism, trade, transport and natural disasters;"
"Calls upon Member States to improve as a matter of priority their emergency response capabilities and the containment of environmental damage, particularly in the Caribbean Sea, in the event of natural disasters or of an accident or incident relating to maritime navigation."

Plan of Action and priorities of the Caribbean Sea Commission emanating from the work programme

I. Introduction

Scientific argument for designating the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development

4. The peoples of the Caribbean are defined by the Sea whose shores they inhabit. In the rich diversity of cultures and nations making up the region, the one uniting factor is the marine ecosystem, on which each ultimately depends.

5. If that ecosystem is under threat, so are the livelihoods of millions of people. The economic activity of the Caribbean is based to a very great extent on the bounty of the Sea and the natural beauty which attracts visitors from around the world, which in turn require the healthy functioning of complex physical and biological processes. The coral reefs and the seagrass beds, the white-sand beaches and the fish shoals of the open ocean: these are natural capital assets whose loss or degradation has huge implications for the development of the region.

6. Apart from the economic importance of the ecosystem, it shapes the lives of all the inhabitants of the Caribbean in ways which defy statistical analysis. The Sea and its coasts form the stage on which the cultural, spiritual and recreational life of the region is played out.

7. It may be united by its sea, but the Caribbean region is divided by its history. Five hundred years of settlement by Europeans, Africans, Asians and people from other parts of the Americas has bequeathed to the region a patchwork of independent States and numerous colonies administered by Governments in a different hemisphere. This presents unique challenges to the establishment of the cooperative policies needed to manage this ecosystem for the common good, and to achieve the most secure long-term future for the Caribbean peoples.

8. The situation is made even more complex by the impact of decisions on the ecosystem of the Caribbean Sea. These decisions are usually made in parts of the world with no direct territorial link to the region: from the use of the waters for fishing by Asian fleets and by international shipping, including the transport of nuclear waste en route to the Panama Canal and oil shipments from the Middle East to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico to the pollution and sediments carried by rivers from deep inside the South American continent; and even the energy choices of societies throughout the world which have major implications for the Caribbean Sea, particularly in the light of the threat of global warming.

9. These complex factors combine to create an urgent need for a new partnership between the international community and Caribbean Sea countries to secure a sustainable future for Caribbean peoples while respecting international norms and Conventions.

10. Four major global scientific integrated environmental assessment processes initiated or funded by the United Nations have recognized the central importance of the natural resources of the Caribbean Sea to the economic and social well-being of its peoples. These assessments have also recognized that the sustainability of the

services provided by these resources is threatened by damaging human-related activities.

11. For example, the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), completed in 2006, did a diagnostic of the reasons for the degradation of the Caribbean Sea and identified the main drivers of ecosystem degradation as coastal land use change, pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) completed in 2007 a further sub-global component called the Caribbean Sea Assessment (CARSEA), which assessed the major ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being. Caribbean Sea fisheries were determined to be worth more than one billion United States dollars per annum, while the Caribbean was shown to be the most dependent region in the world on tourism. This assessment highlighted the lack of integrated management as a major driver of change and recommended the formation of Caribbean Sea Technical Commission to deal with the problem.

12. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) completed its main reports in 2007 and highlighted the particular vulnerability of the small islands of the Caribbean and low lying States of Central America to extreme events and disasters, as well as sea level rise and coral bleaching. The attendant loss of resources from climate change was projected to have a significant effect on, among other things, amenity value of the region for tourism. The Global Environmental Outlook 4 (GEO4), launched at the United Nations in 2007, further confirmed that effects such as climate change are additive to the already serious long-standing problems such as degraded coasts and polluted seas.

13. Three key messages can be highlighted from these assessments. First, some of the vital services which human communities derive from the Caribbean Sea ecosystem are being placed in jeopardy, often by the very activities and industries whose long-term future depends on the continuing provision of those services. Second, a reduction in the stresses being placed on the natural functions of the Caribbean Sea will require new ways of working together among the disparate political authorities making up the region. Finally, the combination of dependence on the integrity of its marine ecosystem and vulnerability to global forces beyond its control puts the Caribbean in a special position which merits recognition and concrete action by the international community.

The Sea and its people

14. The semi-enclosed Caribbean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) is a distinct ecological region, bounded to the north by the Bahamas and the Florida Keys, to the east by the Windward Islands, to the south by the South American continent, and to the west by the isthmus of Central America. Covering an area of more than 3.2 million square kilometres, it is the second largest sea in the world, after the Mediterranean Sea. The Caribbean Sea is however special when compared to all other LMEs in that it has the largest number of countries surrounding it in the world (see enclosure, fig. 1). Further, the disproportionate number of maritime boundaries imposes special challenges with regard to governance of the living resources of the maritime space.

15. The Caribbean, home to more than 116 million people, is divided among 22 independent States, of which 9 are continental countries of South and Central America, and the remainder islands and archipelagos. In addition, four colonial

powers — the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands — still exercise political control over 11 island territories in the region.

16. The complex political structure, produced by the historic struggles for control of the resources of the Caribbean, and reflecting a wide cultural diversity arising from that history, has left the region with a series of overlapping regional authorities exercising varying degrees of policy coordination over parts of the Sea. This creates a significant problem in the exercise of a holistic approach to the management of the Caribbean Sea ecosystem.

17. What unites the people inhabiting this region is a common dependence on two particular products of the marine ecosystem, referred to as ecosystem services. These are tourism and fishing. Both activities strongly illustrate the interdependence of human well-being, economics and the environment within the context of sustainable development.

18. Are people in the Caribbean more dependent on tourism and fishing than other seas of the world? A few facts and figures help to justify why the Caribbean Sea is special in the context of sustainable development.

19. Tourism in the Caribbean region is based on the high amenity value of its ecosystems. According to World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) assessment of the 14 major tourism regions of the world, relative to its size the island population of the Caribbean is more dependent on income from tourism than that of any other part of the world. In 2004, more than 2.4 million people were employed either directly or indirectly in travel and tourism, accounting for 15.5 per cent of total employment, a proportion nearly twice as high as the global average. The sector contributed US$ 28.4 billion to the gross domestic product (GDP), 13 per cent of the total, and US$ 19 billion, or 16 per cent, of exported services and merchandise. Over one fifth (21.7 per cent) of all capital investment was linked to tourism, well over twice the global average. On several islands tourism accounts for more than 90 per cent of GDP. The wider Caribbean also has even more tourist visitors than the small island developing States (SIDS), especially the Central American countries, such as Mexico, in Cancún and Cozumel, and Costa Rica.

20. Twenty-five million tourists choose to holiday in the Caribbean each year, in large part in pursuit of a dream of sensuous relaxation shaped by its natural features — palm-fringed beaches, blue-green lagoons with crystal-clear water, opportunities to see multicoloured fish swimming among coral reefs. Dependence on tourism, therefore, also implies dependence on the capacity of nature to continue providing the conditions which make the Caribbean such a popular destination. In cases such as the diving industry, this connection is so close that degradation of ecosystem quality can be measured directly in lost income.

21. Since tourism is the main economic activity of most of the greater Caribbean States and the Caribbean Sea is recognized by the ACS member States and Associate Members as a common asset and a potential unifier in their development, the Leaders of the ACS signed the Convention establishing the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean (STZC), in December 2001.

22. The Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean will expand as a network of communities and countries committed to ensuring that tourism is not only providing economical benefits, but that its benefits are also reaching all levels of the

population, enhancing the protections of the natural and cultural values, today and in the future.

23. The process to select and evaluate destinations to become part of the STZC is one of the main projects being implemented. The objective is to further develop the sustainable tourism indicators as identified in the Convention and to create practical tools for destinations managers to monitor the sustainability of the tourism sector in their areas. The indicators in the STZC Convention can be categorized as social, economic and environmental indicators. Five destinations have already been evaluated in the pilot phase. Seven other destinations are currently being evaluated.

24. Fishing is also a significant provider of jobs and income in the Caribbean. It is estimated that more than 200,000 people in the region are directly employed, either full-time or part-time, as fishers. In addition, some 100,000 work in processing and marketing of fish, with additional job opportunities in net-making, boatbuilding and other supporting industries. Assuming each person employed has five dependents, more than 1.5 million people in the Caribbean rely for their livelihood on commercial fishing. The activity also brings in approximately US$ 1.2 billion annually in export earnings (see enclosure, fig. 2), with the United States the principal destination.

25. However, the true importance of fishing is not fully reflected in these figures. In a region where most of the population has access to the Sea, fish provide a vital resource for poor communities in ways which do not always appear on the national accounts. It is estimated, for example, that fish products account for 7 per cent of the protein consumed by people in the Caribbean region. Anything which damages the productivity of the marine food chain is therefore a significant threat both to the health and to the wealth of these societies.

26. A number of factors set the Caribbean apart and present particular problems in protecting fish stocks for future generations. One is the sheer variety of fish and invertebrates involved in commercial fishing. This makes it extremely difficult to monitor and manage the stocks sustainably.

27. Another problem arises from the lack of an agreed regional regime with responsibility for the resources of the Caribbean (see enclosure, fig. 3). Existing arrangements enable fishing fleets from throughout the world to engage in a "free for all", placing added pressure on the marine life of the Sea. The Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) Project, however, proposes a nested fisheries governance framework in which the proposed resolution will provide a platform for cooperation between countries at the global level of the United Nations General Assembly (see enclosure, fig. 4). In summary, there is evidence that environmental degradation is undermining development and threatens future development progress. It emphasizes that Millennium Development Goal 7, "environmental sustainability", is critical to the attainment of the other Millennium Development Goals and that more effective integrated policy responses are needed at all levels of governance.

28. These ideas have been generally accepted in resolution 61/197 ("Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations") adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-first session in 2006. For example, it is stated in paragraph 1 of the resolution that the General Assembly "Recognizes that the unique biodiversity and highly fragile ecosystem of the Caribbean Sea require the Caribbean States and relevant regional and international

development partners work together to develop and implement regional initiatives to promote the sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources including, inter alia, the further development of their concept of the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, without prejudice to relevant international law."

29. In order to advance General Assembly resolution 61/197 within the General Assembly, the ACS Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) has worked together with regional and international development partners to develop the following significant regional initiatives for the sustainable conservation and management of the Caribbean Sea: (a) developed an institutional framework for Caribbean Sea governance; (b) prepared a legal framework; and (c) collaborated with IOCARIBE, UWI and others in advancing the GEF-funded (US$ 6 million) Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project.

II. Plan of Action

Institutional framework

Entities being established

30. The Caribbean Sea Commission has agreed to form:

- A Bureau comprising the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and the secretariat
- A legal subcommission
- A scientific and technical subcommission
- A governance, public information and outreach subcommission
- A budget committee.

31. The Bureau will be responsible for oversight of the work of the Commission, initiating actions in respect of relations with external entities and preparation of the annual report to the Ministerial Council.

32. The subcommissions will be chaired by national experts.

Composition and terms of references of the subcommissions

33. The subcommissions will support the mandate of the CSC in three specific areas by:

- Clarifying the information that the CSC requires to meet its mandate to provide advice to the ACS Ministerial Council
- Identifying individuals, organizations or projects that can provide the expertise and information needed
- Coordinating the acquisition, review and synthesis of the information needed
- Formulating or overseeing the formulation of draft advisory documents for consideration by the CSC
- Obtaining and providing clarification as requested by the CSC on any submitted draft advisory documents in a timely manner.

34. The suggested areas of competence of the three subcommissions are:

Scientific and technical subcommission

All scientific and technical aspects relating to the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea, including but not limited to status of scientific capacity, status of fisheries, drivers and pressures resulting in habitat degradation and pollution from various sources, and their socio-economic and ecological impacts on the Caribbean Sea;

Governance, public information and outreach subcommission

All institutional arrangements that may relate to the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea, including but not limited to status and role of regional and subregional bodies, national coordination, the role of civil society, the identification of stakeholders, consequences of decision-making affecting the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea on stakeholders and the delivery of information and awareness materials to stakeholders;

Legal subcommission

All legal arrangements required among stakeholders that may be required to facilitate the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea, including but not limited to the establishment of regional and subregional organizations, and status and implications of multilateral environmental agreements. The major area of competence of the legal subcommission will be overseeing the good faith implementation of the legal regime adopted by the ACS Ministerial Council and taking all the legal steps necessary to promote the declaration of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

35. These areas necessarily overlap and there will be close collaboration among these committees in their work.

Institutional recognition of the Caribbean Sea Commission

36. The CSC will sign memorandums of understanding with regional centres of expertise related to its work programme. Members of the Commission and its subcommissions will recommend these centres.

Legal framework

37. Consistent with Agreement No. 14/07 and No. 3/08, the Secretary-General will write the United Nations Secretary-General requesting a high-level team of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea to meet the mandate of General Assembly resolution 61/197. This will be prior to taking steps to set up the Conference of Oceans and Law of the Sea Experts.

ACS Conference of Oceans and Law of the Sea Experts

38. Following are points of information regarding the Conference:

Juridical underpinnings

(a) Convention establishing the ACS;

(b) Ministerial Council Agreements No. 6/06, No. 14/07 and No. 3/08;

(c) General Assembly resolution 61/197;

(d) ACS Summit Declarations.

Objectives

(a) To design a legal regime that will be legally binding upon the membership of the Association of Caribbean States and will govern the operation and implementation of the declaration of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development;

(b) The regime, which will be formally adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Association, will operate:

(i) Without prejudice to the existing rights and obligations of members of the Association;

(ii) Without prejudice to international law, particularly the international law of the sea;

(iii) Consistently in keeping with the spirit of operative paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 61/197 and succeeding General Assembly resolutions.

Preparatory activities

(a) Consultant to be contracted to draft a working paper for the Conference — 2 months;

(b) Review of the working paper by the legal and the technical and scientific subcommissions of the Caribbean Sea Commission;

(c) Review and approval of the working paper, as revised by the subcommissions, by the plenary of the Caribbean Sea Commission.

Conference participants

(a) Legal subcommission of the CSC;

(b) Scientific and technical subcommission of the CSC;

(c) Oceans and Law of the Sea Experts of members and associate members;

(d) Representative of the Founding Observers of the ACS;

(e) Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea;

(f) Observers from:

(i) Interested third States;

(ii) Institutions of the United Nations system and competent international organizations;

(iii) Competent NGOs, academic institutions and other stakeholders.

Format and modus operandi

(a) Six sessions over a 12-month period, with the possibility of it being extended, upon the motion of the Conference and with the concurrence of the Commission;

(b) The Conference will be held in the host country, or in a member or associate member State of the ACS, if it is determined to be in a position to host the meeting;

(c) The Conference will work in the three official languages of the Association;

(d) The chairmanship of the Bureau of the Conference and any subsidiary entities established will be chaired utilizing the group method as practiced within the ACS. This is without prejudice to the Conference inviting:

(i) Expert members of the Commission;

(ii) Founding Observers of the ACS;

(iii) Other individuals or entities identified to preside over working groups charged with specific tasks aimed at facilitating the achievement of the objectives of the Conference;

(e) The ACS Secretariat will be Rapporteur to the Conference.

Financial issues

39. The Conference will be financed from resources emanating from:

(a) The budget of the Commission;

(b) Financial assistance from individual members or associate members of the ACS;

(c) Disinterested contributions from third States or entities;

(d) Financial and/or technical assistance from the United Nations system and the international community as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 61/197;

(e) Members and associate members, which shall be responsible for financing the participation of their delegations.

Final document

40. The final document of the Conference will be presented to the Ministerial Council for adoption and for transmission by the Ministerial Council to a special summit of Head of States or Government of the Association. The host Head of State or Government of the special summit shall be requested to present the final document of the Conference to the United Nations General Assembly.

Scientific and technical issues

Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project (CLME)

41. The full CLME project proposal was approved by the GEF on 11 April 2008, and implementation will begin shortly. The GEF has approved US$ 6 million and

the countries of the region are providing more than US$ 40 million of in-kind support. The job of Regional Project Coordinator for the CLME project has been advertised and the appointee will assume office at IOCAROIBE in Cartagena, Colombia. The CLME Project will focus on fisheries governance initially. Further funding will have to be raised to expand the project to deal with other issues such as pollution.

Project goal

42. Sustainable management of the shared living marine resources of the Caribbean LME and adjacent areas through an integrated management approach that will meet the World Summit on Sustainable Development targets for sustainable fisheries.

43. The specific objectives are:

- To identify, analyse and agree upon major issues, root causes and actions required to achieve sustainable management of the shared living marine resources (LMRs) in the Caribbean Sea LME in a manner that is consistent with relevant international agreements, e.g. the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement
- To improve the shared knowledge base for sustainable use and management of the transboundary LMRs by compiling and sharing existing information, filling critical data gaps and improving databases for assessments, planning and policy formulation
- To implement legal, policy and institutional reforms to achieve sustainable transboundary LMR management
- To develop an institutional and procedural approach to LME level monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Project components

44. The key components of the full size project are:

- Characterize and analyse the root and underlying causes of transboundary issues relating to the management of marine resources in the CLME through the mechanism of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and develop and agree on a Strategic Action Programme to address those causes
- Compile and share existing sources of information required for good governance of marine resources, and identification and filling of knowledge gaps through appropriate technical programmes
- Establish a culture of networking and cooperation among the countries for management of marine resources, focusing on strengthening existing institutions and structures
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the ecosystem status of the CLME in line with the ecosystem management approach and Strategic Action Plan implementation
- Create successes that serve as examples of how countries can collaborate to manage transboundary marine resources through "strengthening by doing"

- The Association of Caribbean States and its Caribbean Sea Commission are expected to play a major role in the governance dimension of the project, thus ensuring that scientific and technical outputs find their way into the relevant national and regional policy cycle and consequential implementation.
- The ACS Secretariat will take the formal steps necessary to establish the association as a co-financing partner of the Project.

III. ACS High-level Conference on Disaster Reduction

45. The Heads of State and Government of the ACS members, at their fourth summit held in Panama City, Panama, on 29 July 2005, acknowledged the vulnerability of our countries and territories to disasters and the negative impact they have on efforts to ensure sustainable development. They also shared the idea that integrating disaster management and risk reduction into development policies and plans at all levels of government is the best way to combat vulnerability to disasters. Further, they reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation, particularly at the regional level, in order to strengthen the national and regional bodies dedicated to the disaster risk reduction.

46. Consequently, the ACS Special Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction is set to organize a Conference to exchange experiences, lessons learned and best practices in the areas of disaster risk reduction, and to determine areas of intra-regional cooperation in view of the sheer number of initiatives in our region, the scant resources and the heterogeneity of the different actors.

47. The High-level Conference on Disaster Reduction of the Association of Caribbean States was held from 14 to 16 November 2007 in Saint-Marc, Republic of Haiti. This first-ever meeting on the subject for the countries of the Greater Caribbean was attended by delegations from 21 ACS members (including ministers, high-ranking disaster reduction specialists and experienced diplomats), over 18 international and regional organizations as well as members of civil society. In all, over 120 delegates participated in the Conference.

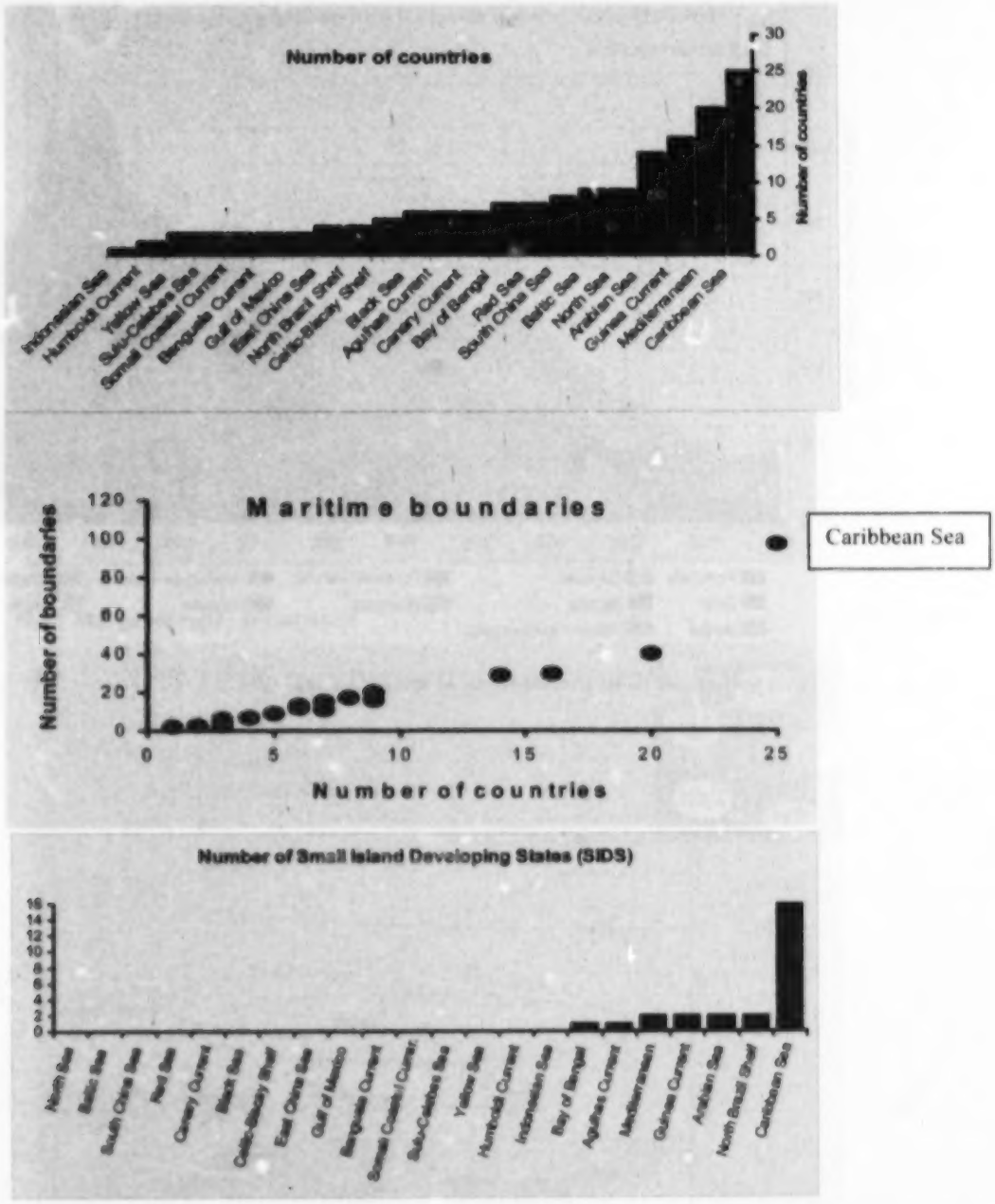
48. The Conference was financed by the Government of the Republic of Haiti, ACS, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and the Government of the Republic of Turkey. Crucial technical and other support was also provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the ISDR, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, the Centro de Coordinación de la Prevención de Desastres Naturales en América Central, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme.

49. The Saint-Marc Plan of Action, as the Outcome of the Conference, has been endorsed by the ACS Ministerial Council as a 27-point document which will soon inform the Work Programme of the ACS in the area of disaster risk reduction. The Saint-Marc POA takes into account, inter alia, the five priorities for action stemming from the Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in 2005.

50. The Saint-Marc Conference is a milestone not only for the ACS, but for all the international and regional organizations involved in disaster reduction in the greater Caribbean region. The Conference raised the profile of the ACS as an ideal forum for bringing together countries that may vary greatly in size and culture yet share the same vulnerabilities, and creates a framework for deliverables in the work of the ACS in disaster risk reduction and its link to the international agenda agreed at the United Nations.

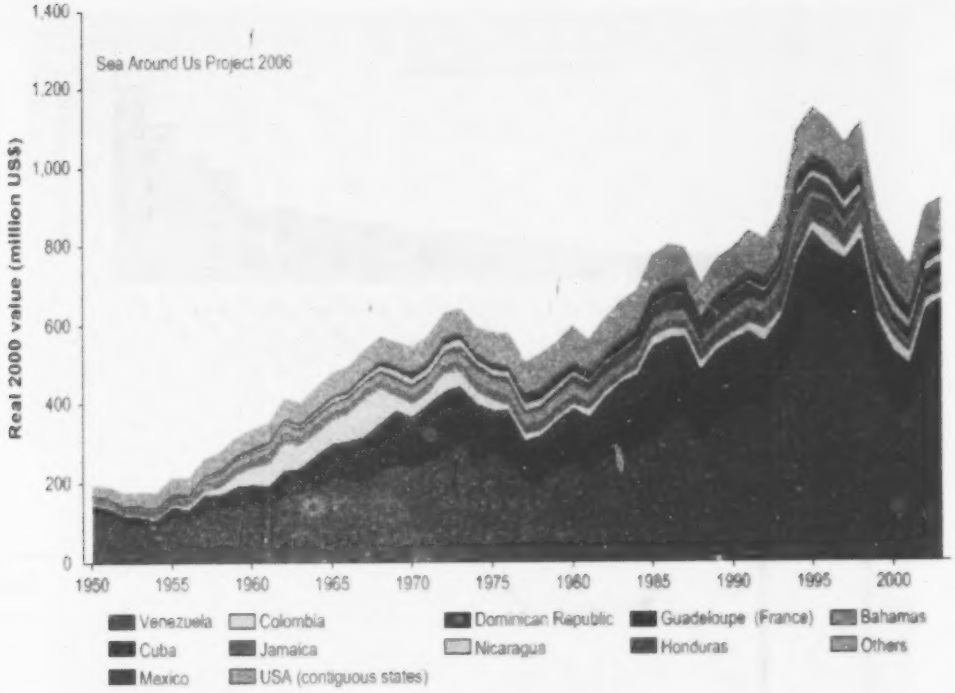
Enclosure

Figure 1.
Geopolitical complexity of the Caribbean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem



Source: Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project, University of the West Indies (UWI).

Figure 2.
The annual value of Caribbean Sea Fisheries



Source: Seas Around Us Project, University of British Columbia (UBC).

Figure 3.
Overlapping and nested fisheries related organizations in the Caribbean

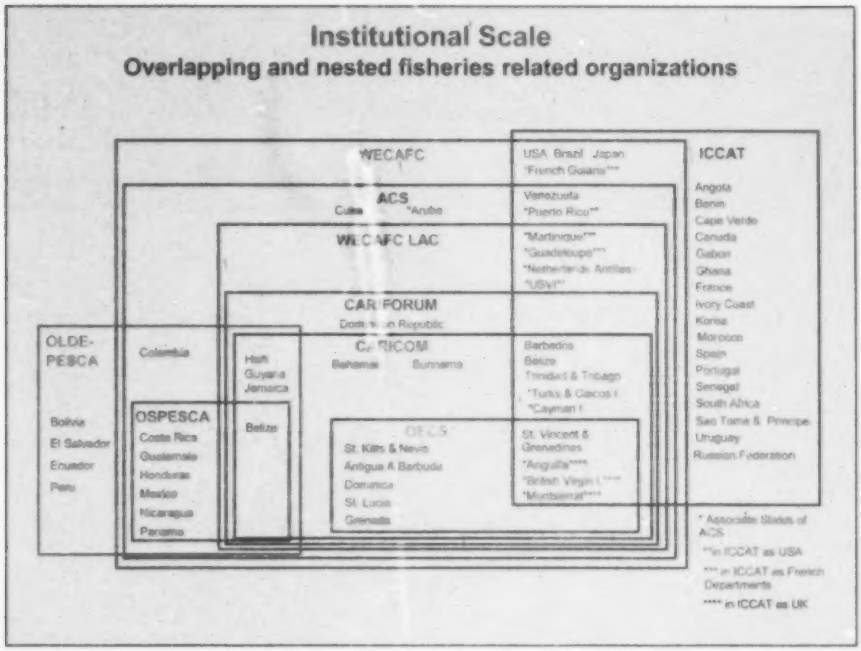


Figure 4.
The LME governance framework